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The interests of the State above all. (Interesy Gosudarstva prezhde vsego)

"Blaht" is a Bolshevik-coined colloquialism which dates back to the civil war and means "graft", "pull", "racket", "shady operation", "log-rolling." The Soviet Government has always fought to suppress the practice it represents, particularly among the higher administrative echelons, but indications are that shady practices survive. The "blaht" method, for example, may be used to wangle a free trip to a summer resort for someone who is not entitled to it or to operate a private shop under a fake contract with some plant or cooperative. In the early days of the civil war and growing famine the "blaht" was largely employed to supplement food rations, engage in illegal bartering and similar manipulations but did not of itself constitute a crime, for the term itself connoted official backing. Hence the difficulty the government encountered in coping with the practice. The term is even applied to the language used to discuss or clinch a shady deal: blatnoy yazyk, or thieves' Latin.

That this pernicious practice still persists, and apparently on a large scale, is evident from a PRAVDA editorial dealing with the subject (26 May). The paper quotes from Stalin's speech to the officials of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection in 1920 which exhorted them to exercise tighter control over the activities of state officials:

"... there are still some workers among our administrators who place narrow departmental interests above the interests of the state. In some cases there is a tendency to place local and personal interests first, and to place personal friendship above the interests of work."

The paper is specific in its charges against some industrial plants which resort to "doctoring up" their figures in cases of plan failure, and others for what might be construed as unsolicited patronage. Thus the Barnaul Boiler Works is told that it failed to account for 85,000 meters of piping last year, and that the head of the boiler turbine industry of the Ministry of Heavy Machine Building "often sends metal to the works without any order and without taking into consideration the needs of the works."

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It has been a standing complaint of all the Soviet industrial units throughout the Five Year Plans that their orders for raw materials are filled "too little and too late." The picture, however, is entirely different where "blat" is in operation. The same Barnaul Boiler Works, for example, "ordered 194 tons of carbon steel for construction purposes, but actually received 281 tons. It needed 26 tons of alloy steel but received 95 tons." The editorial inveighs particularly against the most flagrant type of violation, the use of false figures and fake statements of account:

There are cases when, having failed to fulfill their plans, some administrators add up false figures in their reports on the fulfillment of the plan; and in other cases, when they overfulfill the plans, they do not account for part of the output so as to be able to use it in the future to cover up any possible failure in the fulfillment of the plan.

Poor labor organization in agriculture, both at the top and at the bottom, is attacked by PRAVDA on 18 and 30 May with the reminder that the "gross mismanagement" of labor organization revealed last year resulted in a decline of work in the brigades, and that the situation has not yet been remedied:

Many party organizations tolerate a happy-go-lucky attitude toward the increase in revenue of the collective farms and farmers. A direct result of this is the number of backward farms in various districts. (18 May)

Gross mismanagement and backward farms, according to PRAVDA, represent only half of the trouble. What is worse is that the party officials concerned understandably prefer to keep away from those sore spots and confine their corrective measures to issuing numerous directives and instructions:

In spite of the fact that the backward farms need particularly close attention, certain party workers avoid visiting them as much as possible. Thus, the party leaders of the Mordva provincial party refuse to visit the backward districts. (18 May)

The official view of the Mordva collective farms and party organizations is apparently dim enough to devote another PRAVDA editorial to the subject (21 May). The existence of backward collective farms is said to prove that "there is a serious drawback in the leadership of some local party organizations ... a negative attitude has developed, and the leaders have resigned themselves to the existence of backward collective farms." That the provincial party committee itself, that is the ruling body of Mordva, is not entirely faultless in regard to that delinquency is further intimated in the unamplified assertion that "serious shortcomings have been uncovered in the work of the Mordva provincial committee."

Broadcast material on the drive for enlarged collective farms has been fragmentary, but occasional editorial references to that issue suggest that there is little enthusiasm for merging on the part of the farmers. The general line is that the small collective farms cannot possibly use as much or as complex machinery as the enlarged farms, a fact which acts as a brake on their progress. This may be technically true, but in the Soviet scheme of things political expediency comes before technicalities, and the slow but persistent drive for the farm merger is undoubtedly motivated by the desire to eliminate the elements of individualism inherent and preserved in the small collective farm with its closed-shop tendencies. This may also account for the official attitude of playing down the role of the "link" (zveno or field team, part of a "brigade") in agriculture and elevating the brigade to the honorable title of "the backbone of collective farming."

The reluctance of the small farm management and the farmers, on the other hand, to embrace the merger idea wholeheartedly is understandable; the larger the farm the closer its resemblance to an industrial plant and the greater the network of party and bureaucracy. The latter possibility is, in fact, taken into account by the PRAVDA editorial of 30 May, which points to the weakness of the managerial end of the enlarged collective farms. The inevitable concomitant of a merged collective farm, involving as it does thousands of workers and much machinery, is a topheavy administrative apparatus with its politicians. And it is precisely the politicians that PRAVDA has in mind when it complains of the inadequate number of specialists among the managerial cadres, that is farm chairmen etc.:

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Of the 542 collective farms situated in the region (Stavropol krai) only 60 are being managed by specialists who have completed agricultural institutes and technicums. People have been appointed chairmen to some merged collective farms without having the necessary qualifications.
(30 May)

Agriculture comes in for official criticism from yet another angle. One of the grave shortcomings in the organization of bookselling in the rural districts, according to the editorial of 19 May, is that the booksellers cannot satisfy the political and literary demands of the readers. In less pretentious phrasing, the distribution of propaganda matter in the farm areas is behind plan.

Since the post-war five-year plan the general output of books rose by 84% as compared with 1940 It is essential that books should reach the farthest corners of our country in an even flow.

Party life.

Party organizational work is the object of attention of three PRAVDA editorials (20, 25 & 31 May), each criticizing a different aspect of it. One of the editorial complaints is that the usual gap between party conference decisions and their implementation is still in evidence: "A good resolution is only the beginning; after the decision is taken the burden lies on those responsible for fulfilling it. However, many party leaders forget about this." The paper also alludes to the prevalent practice of looking upon criticism and self-criticism as an end in itself rather than a means to improvement:

... some workers are adept at reading off a whole string of criticisms without making the slightest effort to put the decisions of the conferences into practice. (20 May)

The same theme is taken up by the editorial of 31 May, which maintains that meetings and decisions have little or no bearing on the end result, and stresses as "particularly serious" the fact that no attempt is made to eliminate the shortcomings that have been brought to light:

Some party workers consider that an abundance of meetings and decisions are a sign of effective leadership and energetic working methods. In reality, however, numerous meetings detract people from organizing activities toward the implementation of government and party decisions.

A plea for less aloofness on the part of intermediary and higher party organizations in their attitude toward the primary organizations, particularly the workshop organizations, is voiced by the PRAVDA of 25 May, which reminds party officials that the primary organization "is the link between the masses of workers, peasants and intelligentsia and the leading organs of the party." That that link is not the strongest in the party chain "... has been correctly noted at many party meetings and conferences (showing) that in many cases there are still serious drawbacks in the direction of workshop party organizations."

A MOLOT editorial (Rostov, 26 May), reviewing the party-political education of the oblast, notes a lack of interest in it here and there, and blames the appropriate party leadership for the flagging enthusiasm which, in the case of ideological education, is a matter of grave concern: "Party organizations have weakened their leadership of party education, and have set out on the wrong path."

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Charges of negligence toward party agitators and agitation as a whole also come from the Orel, Odessa and Voroshilovgrad oblasts where both the primary party organizations and the field agitators are said to be derelict in their duties. The CHERNOMORSKAYA KOMUNA (Odessa, Ukrainian, 20 May) intimates that the party instructors, whose duty it is to train party personnel, prefer the coziness of their headquarters where they can prepare "draft decisions instead of visiting primary party organizations." This is probably more true in the case of ordinary agitators who have to cater to a bored non-Communist audience in the plant or on the field.

According to the VOROSHILOVGRADSKAYA PRAVDA (23 May), "some rayon party committees do not pay sufficient attention to agitation work" and thus "in a number of kolkhozes ... the agitators are not working at all."

Marxist-Leninist education in the party-political schools, particularly the year-end review sessions, is the object of criticism by the ORLOVSKAYA PRAVDA which complains of lack of responsibility on the part of the party organizations:

Some secretaries of party organizations seem to forget that the summing-up sessions are intended to show not only what the students have achieved but also what has been achieved by the party organization in such an important field as the Marxist-Leninist education of cadres.

Poor enlightenment work, it appears, extends also to marine activities, for according to the MORYAK, broadcast to ships at sea on 23 May, the political education of the seamen is being neglected on a number of ships. On the Rossiya, for example, "the commanding staff seldom speaks to the sailors, and a similar negligent attitude ... has been adopted by the captain of the tanker Iosif Stalin."

Russian patriotism.

In an otherwise stereotyped treatment of Soviet patriotism on the occasion of the Sixth Victory Day anniversary, PRAVDA again sets the Great Russian people apart as a nation enjoying undisputed priority among all the nationalities of the USSR. Referring to the part played by the Soviet peoples in the last war, the editorial says: "In this heroic struggle of the peoples of our country the leading part was again played by the Great Russian people." The Great Russian people, it will be recalled, have often been mentioned in the past as the "elder brother" and "leading core" of the Soviet population, but all post-war allusions to the subject are made in conformity with Stalin's expressed view. Addressing the Red Army commanders in the Kremlin on 24 May 1945, Stalin emphasized that the Russian people were "the most outstanding nation" (naibolee vidayushchiysia narod) among all the Soviet peoples.

The frequency of such references on the radio and in the press, together with their authoritative source in Stalin, suggest that a new myth--Russian superiority--may be in the making, destined to be integrated into Soviet tradition. This new outlook is in keeping with the official references to the Soviet people, as distinguished from non-Soviet nations, as hero-nation (narod-geroy), and to a number of cities (notably Moscow, Leningrad, Stalingrad and Sevastopol, which offered the most resistance to the Germans) as hero-cities (goroda-geroi). All these cities are located in the RSFSR. The attitude of the non-Great Russian army commanders and people, particularly the Ukrainians and Belorussians, to the new halo placed around their Russian brethren may be assumed to be less than enthusiastic.

Patriotism as distinctly Russian is also alluded to by the editorial of 28 May, which refers to the Bolshoy Theatre anniversary in the context of socialist culture. "Profound patriotism" is said to have developed "under the direct influence of the classical Russian drama and music"

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Children: bought, sold and burned alive.

The International Day for the Protection of Children* is treated in a variety of contexts, which significantly deal at far greater length with the miserable plight of children in the non-Soviet world than with the blessings bestowed upon them in the USSR. Most of the vitriol is directed at American mistreatment of children both at home and abroad (i.e., in Korea), and a whole array of facts and figures are marshalled to prove Wall Street's inhuman attitude toward the "little proletarians." Although the other capitalist countries--France, Italy, Greece, Mexico and others--are accused of their share of child exploitation, the atrocities perpetrated on children by the Americans seem to overshadow everything else. Following are some pertinent quotations:

Parfenova, deputy chairman of the Anti-Fascist Committee of Soviet women:

Nearly 3.5 million children of the USA ... are working at enterprises, in plantations and trading firms in order to become senile at the age of 20;

Four million American children are motherless and fatherless ... they are sleeping in the streets, in doorways, before the entrance barriers of the underground. (Home Service, 30 May)

Anonymous article: "Against war, for peace, for the defense of children":

Never will mankind forgive the American and British invaders ... the burning alive of small school children

The DAILY COMPASS says that in every state (of the USA) there are sales of children. There is a special agency which buys children from their parents who are unable to feed them. (TASS, 28 May)

The North Korean Minister of Education and Propaganda in the magazine SOVIET WOMAN:

Americans throw helpless infants into the fire alive; they chase them with airplanes ... the American butchers had killed by torture 1,000,000 Koreans, one-third of them children. (in German, 29 May)

Anonymous talk: "Murderers of Children" (on American atrocities in Korea):

Out of 280 boy and girl students of primary schools arrested by the Americans, none was left alive, as they were buried alive by the Americans. (in Arabic, 28 May)

Kirillov and Loginov, writing in KOMSOMOLSKAYA PRAVDA, use the occasion of "Children's Day" to remind the West that not all the Russian children who had been deported by the Germans and subsequently liberated by the Anglo-Saxons have been returned home. There is no indication, of course, that those children, now adults, may not be too anxious to "be returned home." Reference is made to returned Soviet DP's testimony on "the difficult situation of the Soviet children in the DP camps." Quoting a former child inmate of such a camp, the writers insinuate that the intention of the Anglo-Americans to use those children as slave labor accounts for their reluctance to send them back home. "The notorious International Refugee Organization which is dominated by the Americans" is said to play its sinister part in shaping the destinies of the Soviet children abroad as slave laborers to be distributed among the capitalist countries. (TASS, 31 May)

*Instituted in 1950, the Day is observed on 1 June.

Gum chewing instigates war.

The LITERARY GAZETTE carries its discourse on Children's Day to a ridiculous extreme by quoting the DAILY COMPASS to the effect that "even chewing gum is used for the purpose of war propaganda and for fanning animal instincts in American children." The pictures appearing on the chewing gum packages "represent bloody scenes of killing and agonies of death All the human figures are represented with beast-like faces, resembling savages or primitive people." That the association of war with the widely used product is deliberate and calculated to foster the warlike instincts in children is further "proved" by the fact that the price of a box of "baby chewing gum" has dropped from five cents to one cent: "It cannot be otherwise than that somebody has grasped their pedagogical impact."

Shortcomings--Agriculture.

Regional broadcasts on shortcomings in agriculture in the period under review are few and confined to six oblasts, four in the European part of the RSFSR and two in the Ukraine. What sounds like a typical complaint of chronic shortcomings is a report from Kursk telling of the general inefficiency of man and machine in the oblast, and tracing the blame to the oblast party committee, which failed to focus the attention of the party organizations on the weak spots:

The engineering equipment of the machine-tractor stations is very badly used in the Kursk oblast. It is sufficient to say that last year over 25 percent of all the tractors were idle. The average daily output per 15-horsepower tractor was only three hectares, against the seven hectares of the set norm In many rayons 30 percent of the tractors are idle. (Kursk, 25 May)

Somewhat milder complaints of poor management are heard from the other five oblasts, and although no specific figures are given, they all have inefficiency as their theme.

Orel:

It should be noted that a number of rayons are lagging in the sowing and are letting the best time for sowing crops slip by, which will undoubtedly have an effect on the future harvest. (24 May)

Rostov:

Some machine-tractor stations had not completed the reequipping of their tractors and cultivators. It often happened that tractors and cultivators were not used for cotton cultivation but for other work. (MOLOT editorial, 23 May)

Voroshilovgrad (on fodder preparations):

But last year's obnoxious practice is repeating itself in a number of kolkhozes ... it is not surprising that this year, too, no decisive measures have been taken for the liquidation of the shortcomings. (25 May)

Kirovograd:

A number of rayons in the oblast are lagging seriously in repairing combines, threshing machines, harvesters and other harvesting equipment and in preparing bases for grain delivery.

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Very little is being done for the mechanization of grain clearing, straw loading, grain loading for transport and feeding of threshing machines. (KIROVOGRADSKAYA PRAVDA editorial, 26 May)

... neglect of the field work on the agricultural and industrial crops ... may result in serious losses in harvest yield, or even the loss of entire crops in individual kolkhozes. (KIROVOGRADSKAYA PRAVDA editorial, 20 May)

Stalingrad:

... for the oblast as a whole, wool deliveries are proceeding most unsatisfactorily. In many rayons the mass shearing of sheep is being delayed intolerably which might result in the loss of a considerable amount of wool. (STALINGRADSKAYA PRAVDA editorial, 20 May)

Shortcomings--Industry.

The chief complaint comes from the Stavropol krai where "the mechanization of labor-consuming work is being carried out slowly." It should be pointed out here that the publicity on the drive for the mechanization of labor-consuming work which was particularly intense in 1949-1950 continuously stressed the fact that any stakhanovite innovation or new machine introduced in construction made it possible to release a number of people for other work. It may be this "other work" which accounts for the reluctance of the workers to embrace mechanization, as advertised, since no intimation was ever given as to the type and possible location of the "other work" or whether the transfer of workers, non-voluntary by its very nature, was desirable for the workers affected. This facet of the mechanization propaganda has, significantly, been discontinued, and the present official line seems to stress the desirability of low production costs. Although references to the mechanization of labor are still made, there is no mention of workers being "released and transferred to other work" through the introduction of mechanization.

A STAVROPOLSKAYA PRAVDA editorial (23 May) complains of "inefficient use of machinery" at construction sites, in the krai electrification administration, and "in other building organizations." Pointing out that there is no lack of machinery in the organizations, the editorial asserts that "the mechanisms are being very poorly utilized" and "as a result of this, more manpower is needed, construction costs go up and the completion of the work is delayed."

The CHERNOMORSKAYA KOMUNA (Odessa, Ukrainian, 26 May) tackles the same problem from what looks like a capitalistic angle--profit:

Is it possible to tolerate the fact that the Starostin plant ... and tannery number five ... incurred tens and hundreds of thousands rubles' losses to the state during the past five months of this year instead of bringing profit?

The Voroshilov canning factory in three months alone incurred a loss of 53,000 rubles owing to the wastefulness, and the Dzerzhinsky plant incurred a loss of 79,000 rubles.

Soviet classes.

The current phase of Soviet socialist development in the USSR, officially referred to as the "transition from socialism to communism", is discussed in an anonymous talk for political school students. The latter are told that since every phenomenon in societal development is either accompanied by, or the outcome of, a struggle, this supposedly peaceful evolution is also taking place "under conditions of a stubborn struggle." This time it is the struggle against "the survivals of capitalism (in the people's minds) which are impeding the building of a communist society."

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The Soviet Union, according to the lecturer, is admittedly still a class society, the working and the peasant class, and the two will have to merge into one, or rather the peasants, not yet as fully proletarianized as the workers, will also become workers. The very existence of different classes, according to Soviet doctrine, presupposes class differences, and these differences can be eliminated only by a change in "the different forms of socialist property (which) determine the difference in the position of these two classes."

How that problem is to be solved during the "transition" period is further intimated by the lecturer, who says that:

"The leading part of state-owned socialist property in the USSR will ... grow increasingly stronger The State farms will grow and become stronger as highly mechanized model husbandry units of socialist agriculture."

The future of the collective farm, as well as of the collective farmers, is revealed in the definition of this particular sector of the Soviet economy in parallel with its permanent counterpart, State farm agriculture:

... the working class is directly connected in its work with State-owned property, whereas the collective farmers are connected with the cooperative-collective farm property belonging to individual collective farms and their groupings.

The transition from socialism to communism is further elaborated in two lectures to students of dialectical and historical materialism by Doctor of Philosophic Sciences Stepanyan (21 and 29 May). Communism in the USSR, according to Stepanyan, will be victorious only when (A), a material basis has been created and (B), the remnants of capitalism in the minds of the people have been eliminated. The time set for fulfillment of the first condition is when the USSR can outstrip the leading Western powers in terms of per capita production, after another three to four Five-Year Plan. There is no indication, however, when the people's minds are expected to be free from those "remnants" of capitalism.

As to the present stage of the transition, Stepanyan assures his listeners that the Soviet is already capable of shaping its own destiny regardless of the attitude of the rest of the world:

There is no such power in the world at present that could force our country to retreat. That danger was liquidated

There would seem to be no need, in view of the above assertion, for particular vigilance on the part of the Soviet people, and Stepanyan's qualification of it, therefore, develops a paradox:

Stalin's idea that ... communism in one country is possible is of great political and theoretical significance It demands that our people always be kept in a state of readiness to be mobilized, for there is still a danger of an attack from outside.

The role of the individual.

Professor Babkin is quite consistent with Marxist ideology when he discusses the role of the individual in history within the frame of reference of the collective masses, particularly when he says that "Marxism-Leninism ... determines the role of individuals in history scientifically." But unlike the well-publicized Soviet belief that it is the people as a whole that shapes its destinies in struggle, with individuals playing a secondary part, the professor's view is that individuals are capable of affecting the course of history:

Any genuinely outstanding individual is indissolubly linked with the advanced revolutionary class and ... brings great influence to bear on the progress of historic events.

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What is not quite clear from Babkin's lecture is the relation of the individual to the State which, according to PRAVDA, is supreme. This relationship, in fact, is not even discussed by Babkin, who quotes Stalin to support the contention that outstanding personalities are those whose ideas and desires coincide with those of the people. Since, according to Soviet doctrine, the State is identifiable with the masses, the test of individual leadership or outstanding personality is the degree of identification of one's interests, ideas, and desires with those of the State.

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